

5.
Virtue and Patriotism founded on Religion:

A

S E R M O N,

Preached at YARMOUTH, Feb. 4, 1780;

Being the Day appointed for

A GENERAL FAST.

By THOMAS HOWE. K



YARMOUTH: PRINTED BY W. PAYNE:

SOLD BY R. LAW, AVE-MARIA-LANE, LONDON;
M. BOOTH, NORWICH; W. EATON, YAR-
MOUTH; AND T. MILLER, BUNGAY.

(PRICE SIXPENCE.)



A

S E R M O N.

PSALM cxxii. 9.

*Because of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek thy good.*

WHAT! was this the only motive upon which he promises to seek the good of his country?—Did he pray for its peace and prosperity from this principle only, the affectionate regard he had to the house, or the worship of God?—No: This was not the only principle that warmed the heart of the pious and patriotic author of this psalm. He felt the love of his country—the love of his people, both as a man,
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and as a citizen. But then, he considered the house of God as the *first* and *dearest* interest of his country, and as that upon which its honour and happiness chiefly depended. Love for divine truth therefore, and zeal for the purity of divine worship, gave that elevation to his sentiments and that ardour to the love of his country which he here expresses; and inspired the importunity of his prayers for its prosperity and peace.

Thus religion was not only united with the virtues of the citizen, but *this*, indeed, was the principle from which those virtues flowed; or, at least, was that which gave purity, energy, firmness and consistency to his patriotism, and completed the character of the real friend of his country.

Give me leave therefore, my friends, from hence to recommend to you the two following propositions, which I mean to make the subject of the present discourse.

I. That the house of the Lord our God, or, in other words, the pure worship of God as founded on the gospel revelation, claims our most affectionate regard as the first and dearest interest of our country, and as that upon which all its other interests chiefly depend. And

II. That

II. That wherever this heaven-born religion has its genuine influence over the mind, it will greatly strengthen and improve all those principles and virtues which form the character of the good citizen, and the real friend of his country.

These, my friends, are subjects of the greatest importance at all times, as they involve in them all your interests, and all your obligations both as men and as Christians. But the present situation of our country, more particularly recommends them to your attention *now*.

Religion has long been upon the decline among us, and from thence, as a natural consequence, there has been an equal decay of those principles, those public virtues which once formed the glory of the British character; and to the decline of which we owe all the calamities we feel, and all the dangers with which we are alarmed. And unless that spirit, that national character is revived, I confess I see but little hope, that our country can ever recover its ancient splendour and importance among the nations, or that civil liberty and Christian truth should long hold their residence among us. But by what means is that public spirit, that national virtue to be revived? The politi-

cian will probably tell you, that the British spirit always rises in the hour of danger, and its latent powers awake to new exertions as new difficulties arise. Would to God it might ! But if so—if that yet latent power is what we most depend upon, it must soon, very soon appear, or, all is lost. This is the hour that will prove whether such a spirit yet remains among us ; or what that spirit can do to save its afflicted and desponding country. For my own part I know of no peculiar energies in the British spirit, but the love of truth and the love of liberty. If these principles revive indeed, we shall still be saved ; and our difficulties and dangers will only serve to recover our character—do honour to our religion, and bring glory to our God.

This, therefore, had I a prophetic commission, I would proclaim through all the land—to the court, to the senate, to the army, and to the navy of Britain ; this, under God, is the spirit that must save us—First the love of our religion, and then the love of our country animated thereby. But my address at present is particularly directed to you. To you then I repeat it—That in the present hour of danger, your religion, the gospel of Jesus which you profess, ought
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to be the first object of your attention and regard, as being in itself the best interest of your country, and that upon which all its other interests chiefly depend. It is the best blessing God ever bestowed upon us, or any other people within the compass of our world. I will not except the original gift of life, rational life itself. Nature indeed teaches us to value life as the first of common blessings, and as that which gives the capacity for the enjoyment of every other good. And divine wisdom itself approves that estimation. *The life is more than meat, says Jesus, as the body is more than raiment. All that a man has would he give for his life; even, though he were possessor of the world.* Yet life, and all the good it can enjoy, adding even the innocence and the joys of Paradise unto it, must not be brought into competition with *the glorious gospel of the ever blessed God.* For that gospel raises the mind of the believer to higher hopes and richer joys, and, in the issue, exalts the nature of the redeemed sinner to higher perfection than innocent man ever knew, though in Paradise.

Do not imagine that I mean to depreciate any of the gifts which the bountiful hand of God has bestowed upon you, either as men

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or as Britons. They are more in number than I can reckon up; and of greater price than I have words to express: And it will be an high commendation of your Christian character, to set a proper value upon them as the gifts of God. But, if you hold any of them, or all of them together at a higher rate than the gospel of your salvation:—If the liberty and independency of your country is more to you than your religion:—If property, friends, or even life itself are worth more in your estimation, than the truth of God and the ordinances of Christian worship, you would deserve to be reproached indeed. Excuse me if I say, there are those, even in the infernal regions who would reproach you for it. For say now,—Suppose your country should rise again to the highest pinnacle of glory—Let the spirit of discord or even discontent be banished from every breast throughout the empire, and one spirit reign in every British heart—Let extended and protected commerce bring in her treasures from every quarter of the globe—Let peace and plenty—Let equal laws, and the most improved state of liberty bless every cottager in the remotest corner of the land: And add to this, every domestic and relative blessing your hearts can desire;

fire; yet, if for these (I know not how to make the supposition, yet) if for these you could give up your religion, or be content without it—If with the wealth and honours of antient Rome, you could bear with its idolatries—If with the luxuries of Asia, you could put up with the dreams of a vile impostor instead of divine revelation—If with British liberty and British pride, you could yet bow your necks again to the Antichristian power of modern Rome, and substitute her superstitions for the religion of Jesus, you would, with all your wealth, with all your glory, you would be the basest and the most wretched of mankind. And if there was a Christian left among you—in the loss of the gospel he would think himself impoverished indeed—he would think himself undone. He would think himself happier in a desert, in the most inhospitable climate under the sun, and among the most uncultivated and indigent of mankind, where he could enjoy the truth of God, the ordinances of Christ, and Christian fellowship, than even in Britain, surrounded with all the elegancies and endearments of life, despoiled of these superior and better blessings. If you ask, Where can such a man be found? I answer, such men have been found
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in every period of the church. Witness the characters celebrated in the eleventh of Hebrews; where you will find men *who esteemed even the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt.*—Men (*of whom the world was not worthy*) who wandered in *deserts and mountains*, and sheltered themselves in *dens and caves of the earth*, rather than betray the truth of God, or resign their liberty in the profession of that truth. Witness the multitude of British martyrs and exiles; whose names will be honoured, and whose virtues will be admired, as long as the name or history of our country remains in the world. Such men were found little more than a century ago, who, not for civil liberty alone, but for *Christian* liberty and *Christian* worship, cheerfully quitted their native country and transplanted the religion of Jesus in its native purity and simplicity to the wilderness of America. This religion, though in a desert, they thought worth more than all the cultivated and fertile lands of Britain, where their fellow Christians claimed dominion over their faith, and usurped the prerogatives of Christ. But you, my friends, are not called to make such sacrifices as these, and I hope you never will. You enjoy—and may the inhabitants

bitants of Britain still enjoy, to the latest ages of the world, the pure religion of Jesus, united with all those civil rights which belong to the citizens of this land of liberty; only remember, that, as your religion is the first and best of all these blessings, so the most sacred rights and liberties of your country, chiefly depend upon the credit and influence which this pure religion of Jesus has amongst us.

I know not whether politicians will give me credit when I say, that it is to this we are chiefly indebted for the greatest improvements in the constitution, the laws, and liberties of our country. But I think if they are well informed Christians, they will say so too. That man knows nothing of the gospel of Jesus yet, nor feels any thing of its spirit, who does not see with grateful admiration, that every iota, every tittle of it is friendly to all the rights of human nature; that it every where breathes the spirit of liberty, civil as well as religious; and demands equal laws, equal protection, and equal justice to every member of the community.

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If it be said it does not every where produce these effects.—Neither does it every where, or in all its professors, produce the moral virtues of the Christian character. They are not all the disciples of Jesus who are called by his name; nor is that any thing like the religion of Christ which in many countries goes under the name of Christianity. But if the British records are examined, you will find, that when the light of truth only began to dawn upon us, it soon awakened the independent spirit of the nation, which scorned to wear the shackles, or submit to the usurpations of foreign power.—As that truth advanced, the spirit of liberty was improved:—Conscience claimed its rights in the worship of God independent of human authority:—And the men who contended, or suffered for Christian truth and Christian liberty, were the best patrons, and the most successful advocates for the common rights of the British nation. And while that truth is cultivated and preserved in its purity—while that spirit remains among us, our country and our liberties are secure.

God will protect the people who love his truth;—he will defend their rights;—he will be the guardian of their liberties. I do not say,

say, that merely retaining the name and general profession of Christianity will be any security to a degenerate and immoral people. The promises of God for the protection of his church do not apply to such a people. The throne of Christ shall stand—his church shall live, and no weapon formed against Sion shall ever prosper.—Yet a people who profess the truth of God, may be justly given up for their prevailing wickedness, and lose their liberty and their religion too, and not one word of promise be forfeited thereby. The security and happiness of our country therefore depend, not upon the name of Christians which we wear, but upon our obedience to the gospel which we profess. If we love that gospel, and it has its proper influence upon us, then God will dwell among us as our glory and defence.—*He will subdue our enemies, and turn his hand against our adversaries.—He will make our peace as a river, and our righteousness as the waves of the sea:* And Jesus himself, the King of Kings, and Lord over all the sovereigns of the earth, will gird his sword upon his thigh, and in his glory and his majesty will go before us in the cause of truth and righteousness.

And to this I add, that the influence of the gospel upon the minds of men, forms them to that character, which, under the blessing of God, is the best security, the best defence of their country in every hour of danger.—It implants in their minds those principles :—It calls forth those virtues which compose the character of the good citizen, and the real friend of his country.

Whatever a man's religion be, it will have a very considerable influence upon his public and political character, if he is fond of it and devoted to it. Hence the treachery and cruel bigotry of the votaries of the church of Rome, who might be honest men and humane characters but for their religion. But the gospel of Jesus, rightly understood, produces no effects upon the character, but what render it more amiable, because more benevolent. It strengthens all the social affections implanted in our nature by the author of our being; and by a necessary consequence gives new vigour and energy to the love of our country too. This I am sure of, that the whole page of history, antient or modern, so far as it has come under my observation, cannot furnish an example of a public spirit, any thing comparable to that of Jesus, the great author and finisher of
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of our faith. Witness that beautiful, that pathetic description the evangelist gives of his last visit to Jerusalem. Though he himself describes it as the bloody city, which *killed the prophets and stoned the messengers of God*, and though he knew that in a few days his own blood would be shed there by the hands of violence, yet, *when he drew near, says the sacred historian, he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.—O! Jerusalem, Jerusalem,—how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.* And what an exact and amiable copy of this divine original does the apostle Paul exhibit to us, in those generous affections for his countrymen which the spirit of Jesus inspired him with. *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart: for I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.* Yet, perhaps, there never were any inhabitants of our globe, who owed so little to their country as Jesus and his apostles did.

did. But the love of God, the love of truth, which expand the heart to universal benevolence, gave all that tenderness, and awakened all that strong emotion, in these expressions of affection for their ungrateful countrymen.

Say also, Christians, can the heart which feels the sacred obligations of divine truth in all its connections in life—the heart which, having its sensibility improved by the gospel, feels all the charities of benevolence and friendship, can such a heart be unattached, or coldly indifferent to the interests of its country? No: It is impossible. The true citizen of Sion will ever have something of the enthusiasm of the patriot; but united with, and corrected by the principles of religion. He will, therefore, in the hour of danger, always be found a zealous advocate—a warm intercessor for his country. Thus the character stands in the psalm now before us. *Pray for the of peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions sakes, I will now say, peace be within thee.*

Surely

Surely that man must have very partial and imperfect views of the interests of his country, or have very little real attachment to it, who in all the warm professions of his zeal—in all the mighty efforts that he makes, forgets the Sovereign of heaven and earth. God himself expresses his astonishment at this among the Jews. *I sought for a man among them who should make up the breach, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none. And he saw there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor.* Blessed be God this is not the case with us. Our pious sovereign repeatedly calls upon all his subjects to humble themselves before the throne of God, and with united importunity to seek his returning favour, and blessing upon us. Unhappily indeed there are those among us, who, through the influence of prejudice, or from a mistaken apprehension of things, not, I hope, either from disloyalty or impiety, refuse to obey the royal call. But, whatever it is that prevents their uniting with their brethren on such days as these, if they are the friends of their country; and, if they are Christians too, they are daily interceding with the God of heaven to heal the breaches he has made upon us.

us. And there are many thousands in our land whose hearts are united with them therein. It is not mere love of country—it is a higher principle that dictates their addresses to the throne of grace. They know, and are properly affected with the thought, that all the nations of the earth are in the hands of God, as clay in the hands of the potter; and they are used to apply to him as the sovereign of the universe in every public as well as private distress. And men of these principles, and of this spirit, have often been the saviours of their country. They have interest in heaven—have power with God, and have often turned away his wrath.

But will the good man, the Christian citizen satisfy himself with only praying for his country? No: He will do more. He is not a citizen only in his closet, or in the acts of devotion. He holds himself at the service of his country, according to his powers and his station in life, in any honourable way. It is not indeed a very common thing for those who have most of the spirit and character of Christianity about them, to have any great share either of opportunity or ability for the immediate service and offices of the state: yet every real Christian, however
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weak his powers, however obscure and indigent, is a most valuable member of society. So far as his mind is formed by the principles of the gospel, and his life and manners are governed by the precepts and example of Jesus, his virtues counteract the contagion of vice—he exhibits and recommends that righteousness which exalteth a nation, and is numbered with those righteous few for whose sake a people, almost ripe for destruction, are sometimes spared. His religion teaches him to fill up all the relations of life with their proper duties. He walks before his house in the fear of God; and his children and domestics are the objects of his tender cares and anxieties. He cultivates their minds, and watches over their principles and conduct, with an affectionate concern for their present and eternal happiness; and in this he contributes still more largely to the welfare of his country, even in future times. If divine providence places him in a higher station, and calls him out to more active services for the public, it is then his Christian principles put a peculiar lustre upon the civil virtues which adorn his character. A Christian must be the friend of liberty: If a languid one, he is not half a Christian. But then, he is the friend of

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order too, and has a sacred regard to the laws and constitution of his country. Impious wits, and profane or licentious men, may laugh at him for mingling his religion with his politics. But impartial men will see, that it is his religion—the influence of divine truth upon his mind, that makes him the conscientious, the decent, the consistent man; equally free from servility on the one hand, or licentiousness on the other. It is from thence he derives those principles, which make him firm and unyielding where truth, liberty and the common rights of humanity are concerned; and from thence too he learns to revere the authority of the magistrate, and to love the rules of order and subordination in society. His loyalty to his prince, or, if it sounds better to British ears, his loyalty to the state, is not a personal or local attachment—it is principle—it is a sentiment implanted in his mind by the religion of Jesus which he loves. He is under law to Christ in his civil as well as in his religious connections. He dare not violate the laws of truth, the sacred rights of justice and equal liberty, to serve the best cause in the world. If it were possible that even *the truth of God might abound the more through his lie*, his religion, and his conscience

science under the influence of that religion, will not suffer him *to do evil that good may come*. And while he acts upon these principles, his patriotism is steady, uniform and consistent; and yet it is animated too: for the religion of the New Testament has a high invigorating spirit in it, and he that feels its influence, cannot be luke-warm where the dearest interests of his country are at stake. For, let me add once more, Christians, your religion itself must inevitably, in some measure, be involved in the fate of your country.—Not the existence of your religion:—No. That holy faith you profess depends not upon the prosperity, the liberty, or even the existence of the British empire. But your possession of that faith—your peace and liberty in the profession of the gospel, may be very much affected by the condition of your country. Our national enemies hate our religion still more than they hate the free constitution under which we live. And could they once shake the throne of Britain, the man of sin would soon be exalted, and popish superstition once more regain its empire among us.

And will not this rouse all the Briton within your breast? Will you not, for the love you bear to the house of the Lord

your God, seek the good of your country by all the means within your power? I hope—I believe you will.

If you ask me, How you shall express your zeal for your religion, and your love to your country, which are thus intimately connected? I answer—Cultivate the principles, and live according to the rules of the gospel: and by every Christian means, make a stand against the Antichristian principles and worship of the church of Rome. Do not grudge the deluded votaries of that superstition their liberty;—do not call for fire from heaven, or the sword of the magistrate to destroy them: but, look to yourselves—look to your principles—let the word of Christ dwell richly in you. Endeavour, in your several stations, to spread the knowledge, and promote the interests of scriptural religion. Guard the rising generation from the attacks of infidelity and superstition, and the still more dangerous assaults of dissipation and vicious pleasure. Cultivate their minds—watch over their manners; and train them up for heaven and their country.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Guard against the spirit of discord which has unhappily gone forth, and divided the hearts of Britons. Make it especially, one of the
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first objects of your prayers, that the unhappy breach between us and our brethren in America may be healed. Call upon the God of peace to defeat the counsels of those insidious enemies, who wish for ever to divide us in order to destroy us both. If you really love the house of the Lord your God, carry your thoughts across the Atlantic. God has his dwelling there as well as here. Let not the present hostilities between us alienate our hearts for ever from them, or excite the least desire of revenge against them. Let us not forget they are still our brethren in the best of bonds, and one of the tribes of the British Israel. And shall that tribe be lost? May God forbid! May Christian prayers, and British generosity timely interpose to prevent so fatal an event!

If we this day approach our God with the genuine sentiments of the citizens of Sion, it is *their* good we seek, it is *their* peace for which we pray as well as our own: and surely such prayers will find their way to heaven! and, presented by the high priest of our profession before the throne of grace, will meet a gracious audience, and bring down the returns of abundant blessings.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: They shall prosper that love thee.

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